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SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE · OFFICE OF INFORMATION · WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

December 1964

No. 13

What's Ahead For Consumers? You can expect to spend less of your take-home pay for food in 1965 than in 1964--only 18 percent as compared with about 18 1/2 percent this year. Reporting at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Outlook Conference for 1965, economists say they expect food expenditures to rise, but not as fast as incomes. Food prices may not rise as much in 1965 as they did in 1964. In fact, the food price increase is expected to be less than the price increase for the entire Consumer Price Index.

Meat will be plentiful, but continued heavy consumption is expected to keep prices near current levels. Supplies of vegetables will be down and prices higher. Increases in fruit--especially citrus fruit--and potato crops should ease their prices. No sugar and coffee price increases are seen. Canned vegetables are expected to average slightly above a year earlier. Prices of snap beans, green peas, sweet corn, and lima beans likely will be higher. Most tomato products will remain near last season's low price level. Frozen sweet corn and lima beans may cost more, but other frozen foods will probably be about the same. Prices of some foods, no doubt, will continue to increase--particularly those with a high percentage of highly processed ingredients. You can expect the cost of eating out to increase, too. Who will get your food dollar? The farmer's share is expected to be slightly lower. Marketing costs are expected to be some higher.

Other Products and Services. In all, 1965 looks like a good year for employment and for relative price stability. In general, you're likely to see accelerated "trading up" and a shift to higher quality and higher priced goods which comes with higher incomes. As in the past, the costs for services will rise at a faster pace than for commodities. Further advances in medical care and other personal services, in property and automobile insurance, and public transportation are expected.

Home Furnishings and Appliances. Furniture prices are expected to increase as much as 3 to 5 percent. But--with the current demand for higher quality merchandise, it is quite likely that the higher price tags will be due in part to better quality. A moderate price decrease is likely for household appliances, but probably less than the 1 1/2 percent price decrease during the past year. Floor coverings? Little change in price likely except for vinyl asbestos floor tile. Several producers have already announced higher prices on it effective January 1.



Clothing and Textiles. Look for improvements in the wear-ability and the care-ability of existing fibers. The textile industry is most excited today about the process developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to give wash-wear garments sharp creases and pleats that hold their sharp appearance through repeated launderings. Look for more stretch cottons, especially for sports clothes; more shrink-resistant wool articles; more flame-retardant cottons--all developed by USDA. Prices? They'll probably edge up. Wool clothes and leather shoes may go up; cotton and silk will probably come down or at least level off. Look for emphasis on fashion and ensembles in clothing and household textiles, and possibly the discontinuance of some lower-priced lines.

Consumer Attitude. They plan to keep buying in 1965, surveys show. Buying plans are well above last year for new automobiles, appliances, home furnishings, and other household goods. For 1965, 17 percent say they plan to purchase major appliances; in 1964, only 16 percent had appliance buying in mind.

PLANTS AND TREES

Scientists Make Azaleas Bloom For Christmas. Azaleas used to be a tall bush which bloomed only in the spring. But now, through the magic of light control and a growth-retarding chemical spray, azaleas can be changed into compact houseplants which bloom lavishly "on command." Using this technique developed by U.S. Department of Agriculture plant scientists, florists in many sections of the country this year will have a plentiful supply for your Christmas giving and holiday living. Colors are rich Christmas red, pink, and white. A few of the numerous flower buds open each day--for as long as 3 weeks.

46 Million? That's Tree-mendous! An all-time record of 46 million Christmas trees will twinkle this year across the United States. That figures about one per family. Or there may be some two-tree families, with a floor tree and a table-top tree. About 23 million of the trees come from Christmas tree farms. Another 850,000 will be sold to dealers from the National Forests, which are managed by the USDA to provide continued wood, water, forage, wildlife, and recreation for the benefit of all Americans.

Christmas Tree Grows Its Own Ornaments. No, it doesn't grow tinsel, but it does grow decorative cones just where you'd like decorative cones to be. Developed by U.S. Department of Agriculture forestry scientists, it won't be on the market for about 8 years yet. But by 1967 growers will get young trees for field testing. Strangely enough, the new tree is a cross between two pines, neither of which has the combined desirable characteristics of their hybrid offspring. It grows fast--about 6 feet in 4 to 5 years. It came almost as a bonus from years of tree genetic research aimed primarily at better wood from faster growing, disease-resistant trees.

NEW PRODUCTS

You Can Sleep Later! Get Partially Fried Canned Bacon. Canned bacon which is sliced, partially fried, and ready for your table after just a few minute's heating is now being commercially produced by at least three U.S. firms. They're using a vacuum-packed process based on research by U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists. Since the new product needs no refrigeration, it's also a tasty convenience food for picnics and vacation cooking.

COMMUNITY

The Two Millionth Hello. Two million consumers in rural areas and small communities now have modern dial telephone service--the result of loans from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to telephone borrowers. The two millionth mark was passed with the approval of a loan to the REA Range Telephone Cooperative of Forsyth, Montana. Now 79 percent of the Nation's farms have telephone service, and most of it is dial.

Credit Help For Low-Income Rural Families. To help low-income families in rural areas raise their income, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is now accepting applications for loans up to \$2,500 to finance small family businesses, trades, services, and farming enterprises. Rural cooperatives which serve low-income families and provide services and facilities not otherwise available may also be eligible for credit under the program. The service opens up government credit aid for the first time to many rural families who previously were unable to obtain either public or private loans to improve their earnings. Borrowers also will be provided management aid to help them make a success of their new businesses or farming enterprises. Information is available at county Farmers Home Administration offices.

FOOD

International Food Standards Coming. An international set of food standards, which will give consumers as well as buyers and sellers a common language as to quality and a yardstick for determining value, is in the works. U.S. Department of Agriculture food standards experts are representing this country in the studies to set up the standards. When grades mean one thing in one country and something else in another, misunderstandings, added marketing costs, and undue trade restrictions can result.

What's Behind School Dropouts? More than a fourth of the Nation's youth--farm and non-farm--16 to 24 years old were school dropouts in 1960, a U.S. Department of Agriculture survey shows. Dropout rate was higher among rural than city youth. Dropout rates were highest--48 percent--for American Indians; 44 percent for Negroes, 25 percent for native whites, and less than 10 percent for youths of Japanese and Chinese heritage. What causes dropouts? Rates were highest for youths who were enrolled in grades below those normal for their ages. Other reasons: low income home, low educational attainments of parents, and homes where the father was employed in a low level occupation. For a copy of "Characteristics of School Dropouts and High School Graduates, Farm and Nonfarm, 1960-AER-65" send post card to Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 20250.

Grading Grows. Consumers as well as processors were able to buy more foods by grade during 1964 than ever before in history, U.S. Department of Agriculture year end reports show. Grading helps you compare quality against an impartial nationwide standard, so it also helps you compare prices. In 1964, the USDA either graded or supervised the grading of half the butter, cheese, and nonfat dry milk produced in the U.S.; more than half the beef; half the lamb; more than half of the ready-to-cook poultry; one-fifth of the eggs; three-fourths of the frozen fruits and vegetables; one-fourth of the canned fruits and vegetables.

Quick Rice Trick. A process for quick-cooking rice, devised by U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists, is being used commercially in box-packaged gourmet rice dinners.

Wise Words On Holiday Birds. How long does it take to thaw a turkey? What about roasting at low temperature? What's the best way to handle leftover turkey and stuffing? U.S. Department of Agriculture food specialists are frequently asked these questions. They say the refrigerator is the best place to thaw a frozen turkey. Allow 1 to 2 days for a bird less than 18 pounds, and 2 to 3 days for a larger bird. Remove store wrapping, and cover lightly with paper or foil. They strongly advise against thawing at room temperature. DO NOT THAW commercially frozen and stuffed birds before cooking. Roasting at a very low temperature is not recommended. Instead, they suggest roasting the turkey in an open pan at 325°F. And right after the meal, remove any stuffing left in the turkey to avoid any possible danger of bacteria growth. Store the stuffing in a tightly covered container in the refrigerator. Wrap turkey loosely and store in the coldest part of the refrigerator. Keep stuffing no more than 1 or 2 days.

SMART SHOPPER

Plentiful Foods Make Wise Buys. When you shop, keep in mind the U.S. Department of Agriculture Plentiful Foods List. Foods included will be top harvest quality, and often attractively priced. Featured for January are red tart cherries, which were a bumper crop this year. Other plentiful: broiler-fryers, apples, canned figs, prunes, canned ripe olives.

RECREATION

Here's Ski Slope News. Trying to pick ski spots near you? You're missing a bet if you don't check in on the National Forests. They offer some of the best skiing in the country. In all, 166 ski areas including more than 80 percent of the major ski areas in the West are located entirely or partially on National Forest lands administered in the public interest by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. For ski facts plus area directory, send post card for "Skiing the National Forests--PA-525" to Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 20250.

PROGRAM AIDS

Know How Meat Earns Inspection Mark. When you see the USDA meat inspection mark on meat and meat products you buy you can be sure they're wholesome. But see for yourself just how rigid inspection is. The color movie "A Mark of Wholesome Meat" is available on a loan basis for school or group use. It is 16 mm., runs 18 1/2 minutes, and tells the behind-the-scenes story of meat inspection with emphasis on prepared meats and meat products. Available from the film library at your state land grant college. Or inquire: Motion Picture Service, Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 20250.

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